

**Opening Statement of Deputy Assistant Secretary Greg Starr before
House Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security,
Emerging Threats and International Relations
May 10, 2005**

Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the committee -- I am honored to appear before you today with my distinguished colleagues, Ambassador Prudence Bushnell and the Director of Overseas Schools Keith Miller, to speak on the issue of protection of U.S. Officials under Chief of Mission authority and their dependents from terrorist attacks outside of embassies.

I would first like to say that we appreciate the GAO's report and the hard work that went into this effort. The report has required nearly a year to research and publish, extensive meetings with Department of State officials, and visits to half a dozen posts overseas. We have closely examined the contents and recommendations of the report in draft and have provided feedback to GAO. I will detail some of our observations during my oral presentation.

Prior to addressing the report's findings, I believe it would be useful to provide the Committee some background information on our global

security programs. For many years, but especially since the East African embassy bombings, Diplomatic Security (DS) and many other elements of the Department of State have rolled out a robust array of security and counter-terrorism programs to address the threat of terrorist attacks against U.S. diplomatic facilities and our personnel and families serving abroad.

The modern incarnation of the Diplomatic Security Service and the vast majority of our global security programs originated with the Omnibus Diplomatic Security and Antiterrorism Act of 1986. Our efforts were re-energized following the East Africa bombings of our embassies in Nairobi and Dar-Es-Salam in 1998. The tragic attacks of September 2001 are often referred to as the event that catapulted terrorism into the forefront of U.S. policy, but our real call to action was the 1998 bombings of our embassies. Funding and legislation following these acts provided many of the tools we use today to address global terrorism against U.S. officials and facilities abroad.

A lynchpin in our overall strategy has been programs to harden our embassies and consulates, seen as the traditional symbols of U.S. overseas presence. In 1999, 2000, and 2001 we used emergency funding from Congress to implement security upgrades and enhancements at our facilities to the extent possible, but we simply could not erase critical vulnerabilities

such as lack of setback and weak blast resistance. Since then we have engaged in a long-term capital construction security program, generously funded by the Congress, to replace 180 of our most vulnerable facilities worldwide. American Embassies and Consulates are more than just symbolic targets. They are the essential platforms from which we conduct diplomacy, consular affairs, commerce and trade, security, law enforcement, global health issues, and myriad other national security programs in foreign countries. As the Administration and Congress have so aptly recognized, protection of the homeland needs to start abroad, not just at our borders.

Although historically the vast majority of catastrophic attacks and threats tend to be aimed at our official facilities, Al Qa'ida and other terror groups will attack "soft" targets when other more hardened assets prove too difficult. Well before the global Al Qa'ida threat, we implemented programs overseas to protect and educate our foreign and civil service officers, their family members and private American citizens on the terrorist threat. These programs are not solely managed by DS but cut across many Department elements, and continue to be refined to address today's global threat against U.S. interests. Many of these programs lie outside the scope of the GAO report before you, but they deserve mention in your consideration of our overall security posture.

A critical element of our program to protect our employees, their families and our official facilities, and a key element of our soft targets strategy, is our security, law enforcement and intelligence relationship with host government entities. Host country police, security, and intelligence forces are in many instances the first line of defense in protecting us against potential threats. Cultivating and developing liaison relationships with host government security services is a core function of our Regional Security Officers (RSO) and other elements within the mission. RSOs spend a great deal of time and energy working on improving the capabilities of the local police. In many locations the police and security services are excellent, but overall the capabilities are uneven.

The Diplomatic Security Antiterrorism Assistance program or ATA is an essential element in helping partner countries combat terrorism with the training, equipment and technology they need to carry the fight to the terrorist. ATA training for host government security officials not only helps to ensure the safety of our American diplomats, but all Americans traveling into these countries.

When we look to our own security resources, we start with offices of the Regional Security Officers. Today we have 500 RSOs at nearly 200 missions worldwide. Many of these positions were created following the

“lessons learned” from the East African embassy bombings. Each RSO serves as the professional advisor to the Chief of Mission on all security matters, and together with the Chief of Mission they are responsible under law and regulation for the security of personnel under their charge. One of the most important functions an RSO performs is developing post-specific briefings and security programs tailored to the threat environment. Every diplomatic mission has thoroughly researched and categorized threat ratings for transnational terrorism, indigenous terrorism, political violence, crime, and counterintelligence and technical intelligence threats. The first four drive resources for security programs on everything from residential security and local guards to surveillance detection, protection of key mission officials, extensive briefings for staff and families, private sector liaison, physical security of all facilities, armored vehicles, and staffing levels. RSOs serve on the Emergency Action Committee at every post and play a core role in the development of post Emergency Action Plans. The emergency plans play prominently in deciding how posts and the Department address all types of situations and threats. In today’s world, the plan covers a wide spectrum, including terrorist threats and bombings, chemical, biological, or radiological incidents, aviation and natural disasters, authorized or ordered departures, and post evacuations. These plans are

exercised at our missions and are routinely part of the post-specific security-briefing program for employees and family members. Overseas schools have always been linked closely with the overall security of missions, and we expect this relationship to grow even closer. Overseas schools attended by mission family members are now being formally added to our Emergency Action Plans, and future post specific emergency plans will include physical security features, vulnerability, security plans and procedures and emergency drills at the schools. It is telling that in a recent study by the Foreign Service Institute, 87% of our officers and families serving overseas for 15 years or more have served at a post that has experienced a crisis as we define them in our emergency action plans. We don't exercise because something might happen – we exercise because crisis will happen.

Let me turn now specifically to the GAO report, the recommendations, and the protection programs for our personnel when they are not in an embassy or consulate. The Department has commenced several new programs and enhanced existing ones based on our experiences, results from accountability review boards, Inspector General recommendations, and in response to advice given to us from the GAO. We deeply appreciate the past and continued support of Congress in this ongoing effort. In this GAO report entitled “STATE DEPARTMENT HAS NOT FULLY

IMPLEMENTED KEY MEASURES TO PROTECT AMERICANS

OUTSIDE THE EMBASSY,” GAO is stating that we could do more. GAO is correct, and has identified in its recommendations a few key areas that we can improve on. However, I believe it’s important to provide some clarification of the existing programs that we have in place, to give you a sense of the importance we attach to this issue, the time we spend on it, and the level of effort and funding it takes to protect our employees and families overseas in places other than the hardened facilities.

In the past seven years we have accomplished the following:

- Delivered over 1,500 armored vehicles to our posts overseas, to provide the ability to transport our people safely in heightened threat conditions;
- Instituted a comprehensive chemical/biological/radiological protection program, providing escape masks and equipment for our personnel overseas, and the training necessary to use the equipment;
- Provided local guards, roving patrols, and react teams at our residences according to threat ratings, costing in excess of \$100,000,000 this year.

--Provided residential security upgrades to over 13,000 residences overseas, including grills, security doors, alarms, and lighting. These residential security upgrades are based upon the threat environment at the post.

--Funded grants to upgrade security at 181 of 189 schools where dependents of American children attend, providing shatter resistant window film, public address warning systems, radio communications to the embassy, and more robust physical security upgrades.

--Commenced a worldwide surveillance detection program, which while normally focusing on our official facilities, are available to be reprogrammed to non-official facilities to address local the threat environment ;

--Enhanced the Crisis Management Exercise program with support from the Foreign Service Institute;

--Conducted 28 Mobile Training visits to 68 posts since 2003. This training, provided to all members of the Embassy community, addresses a wide range of defensive measures that employee's can use to counter and respond to incidents of crime, terrorism and emergency medical response.

--OBO has expended over \$10,000,000 on long-term residential security improvements since 2003. We also funded and completed security

enhancements to 23 off-compound employee recreation associations since 2004.

As these programs attest, we understand that terrorists do not only target our hardened facilities. Our philosophy remains that we must have overlapping and complementary security layers in order to have a truly effective security program.

There is yet one more level that I must discuss, and that is the management of security issues and crisis management that stems from the top, the Chief of Mission. Every Ambassador and Consul General today understands his/her security responsibilities thoroughly. Emergency action plans are implemented almost weekly in some corner of the world, and one of the most important tools and visible signs of the efforts made to protect our employees and families are evacuations. When the threat is too high, tripwires crossed, or political violence or local instability too dangerous, we move non-essential employees and families out of harms way. Our average, regrettably, has been one authorized or ordered departure from a post every three and a half weeks during the past 16 years. A sign of the times is the large number of posts we currently have in draw-down or unaccompanied status, and this is likely to continue for some time.

Our personnel overseas have already remained at a heightened threat status since 1998. We have taken significant steps to harden our facilities and prepare our personnel for a wide variety of contingencies ranging from suicide car bombings and anthrax contamination to an attack on a soft target. In the near and mid-term, we see the global terror threat against U.S. interest abroad continuing. I have identified many of the steps we have taken to secure our official facilities, our personnel, and to protect them in soft target environments. Much has been accomplished to detect and deter the threat. However, as the GAO report points out, hands-on training is a vital component for an effective security program. The Diplomatic Security Antiterrorism Course, or DSAC, is an elective course offered to our officers who are assigned to critical threat level posts. In 2003 and 2004, 239 officers attended this course which will be offered seven times this summer. With the advent of Iraq operations, we modified the course to Iraq specific considerations and made it mandatory for anyone serving under the Chief of Mission in Iraq. Since December of 2003, 1193 personnel have attended 67 offerings of this course. We received almost immediate feedback which indicated the training was timely, necessary and on target. It has already saved lives, and the consensus among various Department elements is that the dangers of serving abroad in this age will increasingly require training,

as opposed to briefings, to prepare our employees and families properly.

The ability to stand up such courses and train the high numbers of personnel going to vulnerable environments requires resources. We continue to expand FSI and DS training for Department personnel across a full range of security and crisis management areas. High threat training for DS personnel assigned to war zones and critical threat terrorist areas is now mandatory. Post specific security training and briefing programs are also a core element of a mission's overall security program. In addition, a "soft target protection" module has been incorporated into RSO training and the Department is adding similar training to FSI's Ambassadorial and Deputy Chief of Mission training to promote the security of U.S. officials and their families outside the embassy.

The terrorism threat against our people and facilities remains high. Our government has rolled out a robust strategy to root out terror and the sources of terror wherever it has taken hold, but this likely will be a protracted battle. Our diplomats are in the front lines of this fight, and the Department, our overseas missions and the intelligence community must continuously evaluate threat information to include threats against soft targets. The foreign policy priorities of our Nation require us to work in some of the world's most dangerous security environments. We are

constantly looking for ways to improve and make our personnel and their families safer. The Department's long-range Capital Security Building Program, our physical and technical security upgrades and additional enhanced training programs are all means to accomplish this task.

I'll be happy to address your questions once my colleagues complete their opening comments. Thank you for your time today.